

## SWOT Analysis of Tourism Development in Malingshan Geopark in Linyi City, China



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**ABSTRACT:** Using the SWOT analysis framework, this study seeks to thoroughly evaluate the tourism development potential of the Malingshan Geopark in Linyi City, China. The geopark is distinguished by its unique geological formations, diverse natural scenery, and rich historical and cultural heritage, making it highly promising for tourism development. Nevertheless, the park also encounters certain challenges and limitations during development. Through an in-depth analysis of the geopark's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, this study offers theoretical foundations and practical recommendations for formulating scientifically sound and strategically viable tourism development strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** Linyi City; Malingshan; Geopark; Tourism Development; SWOT Analysis

### I. INTRODUCTION

Linyi City is located in the south of Shandong Province and is rich in natural and cultural resources. As one of the important tourism resources in Linyi City, the Malingshan Geopark has attracted much attention due to its unique geological relics, beautiful natural scenery, and rich historical culture (Fig. 1). With the rapid development of the tourism industry, the tourism development of the Malingshan Geopark has become an essential driving force for the local economic development [1]. However, in the development process, how to give full play to its advantages, overcome its disadvantages, seize opportunities, and deal with threats is an urgent problem that needs to be solved. Therefore, this study uses the SWOT analysis framework to conduct an in-depth analysis of the tourism development of the Malingshan Geopark.

SWOT analysis is a strategic management tool used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of a project, organization, or individual. The acronym SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. By systematically assessing these four dimensions, SWOT analysis enables decision-makers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current situation and potential prospects, thereby facilitating the development of effective strategies and action plans [2, 3].

### II. SWOT ANALYSIS

#### A. Strengths

**Unique Geological Relics and Natural Landscapes:** The Malingshan Geopark is distinguished by its unique geological formations and natural landscapes, which constitute the core strengths of its tourism development [4-6]. Within the park lies a rare Quaternary active fault, one of China's few features. The strata on either side of this fault differ by over 100 million years, offering visitors an unparalleled geological experience often described as "a step back through time spanning millions of years". Furthermore, the red sandstone and conglomerate formations have created the ideal conditions for developing picturesque landscapes, resulting in numerous captivating natural scenes. These distinctive geological and natural features provide abundant tourism resources, making the Malingshan Geopark an attractive destination for many visitors.

**Rich Historical and Cultural Heritage:** Not only does Malingshan boast distinctive natural landscapes, but it also embodies a profound historical and cultural heritage. According to historical accounts, this was where Sun Bin and Pang Juan, strategists from the Warring States Period, engaged in their legendary battle of wits [7, 8]. The mountain is home to numerous historical sites, including the Sun Bin Cave and the Tomb of Pang Juan. Furthermore, Malingshan stands as an important military historical site. These historical and cultural relics not only enhance the tourism offerings of Malingshan but also provide visitors with profound insights into history, thereby enriching their travel experience and appeal.

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**Superior Geographical Location and Transportation Conditions:** The Malingshan Geopark is situated at the intersection of two provinces (Jiangsu Province and Shandong Province), boasting exceptionally convenient transportation infrastructure [9]. The surrounding area is serviced by several high-speed railway lines and expressways, including the Beijing-Shanghai High-Speed Railway, Xuzhou-Lianyungang High-Speed Railway, and Beijing-Shanghai Expressway, which offer tourists a variety of efficient travel options. Moreover, the presence of multiple nearby airports significantly enhances accessibility and broadens the park's potential visitor base. These strategic geographical advantages and superior transportation links facilitate tourist visits and provide substantial opportunities for developing and expanding the geopark's tourism sector.

**Government Support and Enhanced Awareness of Ecological Protection:** The Malingshan Geopark is distinguished by its unique geological formations and natural landscapes, which constitute the core strengths of its tourism development [10]. Within the park lies a rare Quaternary active fault, one of China's few features. The strata on either side of this fault differ by over 100 million years, offering visitors an unparalleled geological experience often described as "a step back through time spanning millions of years". Furthermore, the red sandstone and conglomerate formations have created the ideal conditions for developing picturesque landscapes, resulting in numerous captivating natural scenes. These distinctive geological and natural features provide abundant tourism resources, making the Malingshan Geopark an attractive destination for many visitors.



**Figure 1.** Some landscapes of the Malingshan Geopark. A, Stone inscription, bearing the inscription Malingshan Geopark; B, Monument at the Maipo earthquake active fault site in Malingshan Geopark; C and D, the scene of the Maipo earthquake active fault site in Malingshan Geopark.

### B. Weaknesses

**The Development of Infrastructure has not Kept Pace with Demand:** The infrastructure development of the Malingshan Geopark currently lags behind that of more established tourist destinations. This disparity is particularly evident in several key areas: transportation facilities, accommodation options, catering services, and public amenities. For example, access routes to the park may lack sufficient convenience, and internal transportation infrastructure, such as sightseeing vehicles and pedestrian pathways, may be underdeveloped. Additionally, the quantity and quality of lodging and dining establishments may fall short of meeting the growing demands of visitors. These infrastructural deficiencies not only detract from tourists' overall experience but also constrain the geopark's capacity to accommodate visitors, thereby impeding further tourism development.

**The Tourism Products are Monotonous:** Currently, the tourism offerings at the Malingshan Geopark are predominantly centred on sightseeing tours, and they lack diversified and personalized experiences. As the tourism market evolves, tourists' expectations

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for products have become increasingly diverse. Visitors now often seek more experiential and interactive activities, such as outdoor adventures, science education programs, and cultural immersion experiences. However, the geopark currently offers a limited range of products in these areas, making it challenging to meet the varied needs of visitors. This shortfall diminishes tourist satisfaction and loyalty and potentially undermines the geopark's competitiveness in the tourism market.

**An Inherent Conflict between Ecological Conservation and the Advancement of Tourism:** As a nature reserve, the Ma Ling Mountain Geopark confronts a significant tension between ecological conservation and tourism development. On the one hand, exploiting geological relics and natural landscapes for tourism may impose considerable pressure on the ecological environment. On the other hand, preserving the ecological environment is fundamental to the geopark's sustainable development. Balancing the rational development of tourism resources with stringent environmental protection measures represents a critical challenge for the geopark. Improper management could result in environmental degradation, undermining the geopark's reputation and compromising its long-term sustainability.

**Tourism Publicity and Promotion Efforts are Insufficient:** Despite its unique advantages in geological relics and natural landscapes, the Malingshan Geopark currently has limited popularity and influence. This can primarily be attributed to insufficient efforts in tourism promotion and publicity. There are notable deficiencies in the geopark's promotional methods, channels, and content, resulting in tourists having an inadequate understanding of the geopark and a limited appreciation of its tourism value. Therefore, enhancing tourism promotion and publicity to boost the geopark's visibility and influence is critical for the sustainable development of its tourism sector.

### C. Opportunities

**Policy Support and Trends in Tourism Industry Development:** Both the national and local governments are actively promoting the development of the tourism sector by introducing a comprehensive set of supportive policies and measures [11]. Concurrently, as the tourism industry undergoes transformation and upgrading, along with the evolution of consumer preferences, tourists' demands for tourism products have become increasingly diverse and personalized. This presents a favourable policy environment and significant market opportunities for the tourism development of the Malingshan Geopark. Leveraging policy support and aligning with industry trends, the geopark can enhance the innovation and upgrading of its tourism offerings, elevate the quality and standards of its services, and strengthen its competitive edge in the tourism market.

**The Integrated Development of Ecological Restoration and Health and Wellness Tourism:** In recent years, ecological restoration and health and wellness tourism have emerged as significant trends in the tourism industry [11]. The Malingshan Geopark has achieved notable success in ecological restoration, thereby establishing a robust environmental foundation for developing health and wellness tourism. Based on the above-mentioned achievements, the park can create various health and wellness tourism products, such as forest oxygen bars, hot spring therapy, and eco-health programs, to attract visitors seeking a healthier lifestyle. Moreover, advancing health and wellness tourism can further enhance the geopark's ecological protection efforts and promote sustainable development.

**With the Increase of Leisure Demand, the Tourism Industry Shows a Trend of Rapid Development:** As living standards improve and leisure demands increase, the tourism industry is experiencing rapid growth [12]. The Malingshan Geopark, as a unique tourism resource, holds significant market potential. Regarding regional tourism cooperation, Linyi City and its surrounding areas possess abundant tourism resources that can be leveraged to foster collaborative efforts. By forming strategic partnerships, these regions can jointly develop tourism brands and enhance their collective competitiveness in the tourism market.

**Modern Technology Improves Travel Experience and Service Quality:** As science and technology continue to advance and innovate, the tourism industry is actively exploring new development models and technological applications. The Malingshan Geopark can leverage modern technological solutions to enhance the visitor experience and significantly improve service quality.

### D. Threats

**Destruction of Ecological Environment and Over-exploitation of Resources:** Tourism development frequently exerts significant pressure on the ecological environment. In the case of the Malingshan Geopark, inadequate scientific and rational planning and management during its development may result in environmental degradation, including vegetation destruction, soil erosion, and loss of biodiversity habitats. Furthermore, excessive commercialization and high levels of tourist activity can lead to irreversible damage to geological relics and natural landscapes, undermining the park's long-term sustainability.

**The Problem of Intensifying Market Competition and Homogenization:** With the rapid expansion of the tourism sector, competition in the tourism market for natural landscapes, including geological parks, has intensified significantly. The Malingshan Geopark must confront competitive pressures from neighbouring regions and similar attractions. Without distinctive tourism



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products and a differentiated market positioning, the park risks losing visitors and experiencing a decline in market share. Homogenization may also lead to diminished tourist experiences, undermining the park's appeal and reputation.

**Capital Constraints and Uncertain Investment Returns:** Tourism development necessitates substantial capital investment across various domains, including infrastructure construction, scenic area maintenance, and marketing efforts. However, the Malingshan Geopark faces significant challenges in tourism development due to funding shortages and uncertainty regarding investment returns. On one hand, inadequate financial support can result in delayed development timelines or failure to meet anticipated outcomes. On the other hand, the inherent volatility and unpredictability of the tourism market may lead to suboptimal investment returns, potentially causing economic losses for investors.

**Inadequate Management Practices and Substandard Service Quality:** Effective management and high-quality services are critical factors in attracting tourists to a geopark. However, during the development of the Malingshan Geopark, inadequate management or substandard service quality may lead to decreased visitor satisfaction and the propagation of negative word-of-mouth. For example, issues such as disorganized park administration, unsatisfactory sanitation conditions, and insufficient safety measures can significantly impair tourists' travel experiences and overall park evaluation. Moreover, the lack of professional tour guides and interpretive services may hinder tourists' understanding of the geological features and natural landscapes, thereby diminishing the perceived value of their visit.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

#### A. Well-defined Development Orientation and Objectives

First and foremost, it is imperative to delineate the strategic orientation and objectives of the Malingshan Geopark. As an integrated tourism destination that encompasses geological relics, natural landscapes, and historical culture, the Malingshan Geopark should strive to position itself as a preeminent centre for geological science education and popularization, a model ecological tourism zone, and a distinguished historical and cultural tourism destination both domestically and internationally. By thoroughly investigating the scientific significance of geological relics, the ecological importance of natural landscapes, and the heritage value of historical culture, the park can achieve diversified and sustainable development and utilization of its tourism resources.

#### B. Enhance Strategic Planning and Management Frameworks

In tourism development, it is essential to strengthen planning and management to ensure development activities' systematic and orderly progression. A comprehensive and scientifically grounded tourism development plan should be formulated, clearly delineating the sequence of development phases and prioritizing key tasks. This approach will prevent uncoordinated and overly commercialized development. Concurrently, administrative departments should establish an effective and robust tourism management framework to enhance market supervision and service delivery, thereby improving tourism services' quality and visitor satisfaction.

#### C. Enhance and Upgrade Tourism Infrastructure and Service Quality

To enhance the overall tourist experience, increasing investment in and development of tourism infrastructure is imperative. This includes improving essential facilities such as transportation, accommodation, catering, and retail services within scenic areas, thereby enhancing these destinations' reception capacity and service quality. Simultaneously, efforts should be intensified to maintain environmental hygiene and ensure robust safety measures, guaranteeing both visitors' personal safety and the tourism environment's cleanliness.

#### D. Strengthen Science Popularization Education in Geology

The Malingshan Geopark, endowed with abundant geological heritage resources, should fully leverage its potential for science popularization and education. The Geopark can significantly enhance public awareness and interest in geological sciences by constructing facilities such as geological museums and educational galleries and organizing comprehensive geological science education programs. Additionally, it is crucial to strengthen collaboration with research institutions and universities to facilitate the deep integration of geological scientific research and tourism development.

#### E. Promote the Development of Eco-tourism

In tourism development, it is imperative to prioritize the harmonious integration of ecological protection and sustainable tourism growth. Enhance the monitoring and preservation of the environmental environment to ensure that tourism activities do not adversely impact it. Concurrently, promoting ecotourism products such as eco-hiking and wildlife observation will foster greater environmental awareness and active participation among tourists.

#### F. Enhance Marketing Strategies and Intensify Brand Promotion Efforts

It is imperative to intensify marketing initiatives and brand promotion strategies to elevate the prominence and influence of the Malingshan Geopark. Organizing diverse tourism festivals and geological science education seminars will attract a broader

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audience. Concurrently, enhanced collaboration with tourism media outlets and platforms and comprehensive online and offline promotional campaigns will bolster the park's visibility and reputation.

### CONCLUSIONS

The Malingshan Geopark is distinguished by its unique geological formations, diverse natural landscapes, and rich historical and cultural heritage, presenting significant potential for tourism development. However, the park also encounters specific challenges and limitations during its developmental phase. By conducting a comprehensive SWOT analysis of the tourism development in the Malingshan Geopark, it becomes evident that strengths and weaknesses coexist alongside opportunities and threats. Consequently, when formulating tourism development strategies, it is imperative to thoroughly consider these factors to capitalize on strengths, mitigate weaknesses, seize opportunities, and counteract threats, thereby fostering the sustainable development of tourism within the Malingshan Geopark.

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